Classroom Communication in Engineering and Arts at Undergraduate Level in Indian Context

M. Subha, D. Nagarani

Abstract: *Effective classroom communication is the highest challenge to teachers at undergraduate level in this 21st century. Owing to the higher level of exposure to internet and distractions through entertainment, when teachers stand in the classroom to establish an intellectual communication that is transmission of ideas, so many factors disrupt the effective communication between the teacher and the learner. The role of a teacher has also become a facilitator, which is diminishing the rigidity of a teacher. A facilitator is supposed to impart knowledge and skill using all the latest technological advancements like power point presentation, computer assisted teaching, using internet, you tube videos and online learning platforms etc. The challenge is that the facilitator should excel the machines and internet by maintaining classroom dynamics to make the teaching-learning process interesting, lively and fruitful. This paper is an attempt to delineate the salient features of effective classroom mechanism at undergraduate level in arts and science, maritime and technical education. It presents the importance of communication as a dialogue in classroom, learner participation, the reasons for non-participation, classroom management strategies and limitations, actual process of long lasting learning amongst Engineering, Arts and Science domain learners, the necessity of experiential learning and the requirement of skills based teaching and learning.*

Keywords : Communicative Language Teaching, Interpersonal communication skills, Skills based learning, teaching and learning in 21st century.

I. INTRODUCTION

Communication in a classroom is mainly intended to share knowledge, skill, motivate the learners for self-study and inspire them by being a role model, so classroom communication takes place at different levels both at physical and mental space. Mohd. Yusof Abdullah says in his *Student's Participation in Classroom: What Motivates them to Speak up?* "learning is acquiring new or modifying existing knowledge, skills or behaviours. Therefore, if learning is defined as quest for knowledge, skills or behaviours, then

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* Correspondence Author
  Dr. M. Subha*, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Academy of Maritime Education and Training, AMET Deemed to be University, Chennai – 603112, Tamil Nadu, India. subham@ametuniv.ac.in; subhamarimuthu@gmail.com
  Dr. D. Nagarani*, Assistant Professor, Department of English, Anna Adarsh College for Women, Anna Nagar, Chennai – 600040. dnagarani2009@gmail.com

students need to be active in that quest" (Abdullah, 2012, p. 517). These objectives can take place effectively through activities based teaching coupled with lectures. Since syllabus covering requires lecture mode, syllabus-uncovering demands activities based teaching to enable the learners discover their potential. The key factor behind classroom communication is learner participation, which makes learning process more dynamic, lively and productive. Harry G. Murray and Megan Lang state in their "Teaching and Learning in Higher Education", "it is widely claimed that active student participation in the college classroom facilitates both acquisition of knowledge and development of problem solving skill" (Murray&Lang, 1997, np). In between the entry behavior/ knowledge/ skill and exit behavior/ knowledge/ skill, the process of development takes place through classroom communication. The importance of a facilitator is assured through the kind of rapport he/ she can hold with the learner especially good interpersonal communication, which defines the teacher-learner relationship mainly at undergraduate level, where the learners are very new to higher education.

In India, Engineering and Maritime education fall under All India Council for Technical Education and Directorate General of Shipping respectively. For both, application and outcome based syllabus design and teaching modes are prioritized whereas CDIO (conceive, design, implement, and operate concept) is in the vogue internationally. When the learner do not participate in class room communication, even then he sits passively absorbs the content and in addition to that exam preparation enables them to reproduce the learned concepts in exam answer sheets, finally results in gaining marks. Whereas a learner who actively participates in discussions, presentations and skill based training, dynamically involves oneself in the process called learning, which in turn strengthens their learning process and confidence. Though initially they are likely to commit mistakes, through the wrong answers and performance in any skill based activity/ training, they try to find its solution or answer – where actual learning through trial and error occurs. When the under graduate learners are motivated through such participation mode, in later stages in their post graduation or research level, this training could enable them to contribute new findings. Mohd. Yusof Abdullah restates Siti Maziha's result that students can "learn how to think critically and enhance their intellectual development if they are in active participant in the classroom" (Abdullah, 2012, p.62).

II. PROPOSED METHODOLOGY

While participation plays a vital role in moulding the personality traits, confidence, academic performance and skills proficiency, this paper analyses the cause and reason for non-participation of learners asserting the vitality of participation. When an individual learner's progress is of pivotal importance, on the other hand overall classroom management is another important aspect to the teachers. The study delineates the factors causing effective and proactive classroom management strategies and its limitations.

Feedback from hundred and fifty undergraduate Arts and Science students representing the interesting and effective classes that they had during the first two years of study is collected and represented through tabular form. In addition to that, the same feedback is taken from hundred Engineering and nautical science students also. A comparative study between the average of the factors contributing to interesting and productive classes is presented with graph, analysed and further recommendation is also discussed.

III. LEARNER DO NOT WANT TO PARTICIPATE

There are a list of reasons based on which a learner do not want to participate in classroom communication/ activities. They are language barrier, lack of interest in studies, class room physical ambience is not conducive (very cold/ hot or sweating extremely), personal issues, teaching mode is monotonous, not interested in subject, difficult subject/ concepts, distraction by wrong association (friends) etc. Mustapha et al. state in their *Factors Influencing Classroom Participation: A Case Study of Malaysian Undergraduate Students*, "Negative classmate traits ranked highest in the list of most frequent factors mentioned as discouraging students participation" (Mustapha, 2010, p.1082). Compared to negative learner attitude, negative lecturer traits are ranked second in the case study and the third one is "negative student trait" (Mustapha, 2010, p.1082).

On the other hand, there are certain qualities, which intensify effective classroom communication. Prime factor is calling the learners by their name that can establish a good range of interpersonal communication between the teacher and learner. Apart from the subject knowledge, a teacher establishes a good rapport with the learner by this habit. A teacher can make the learner participate by calling them by name – when he/she does it, an obligation or proper explanation is likely to rise from the learner. While Positive learner attitude and classmate traits are essential on learners' side, lecturers with sense of humour, open-minded, approachable, friendly, "flexibility to make the learner challenge each other's opinion and accept different point of view" (Mustapha, 2010, p.1081) are the important factors to facilitate learner participation.

IV. IMPORTANCE OF PARTICIPATION

Active participation plays a vital role in refining the learner skills, increasing the level of confidence and grooming one's personality. In the beginning, they may give wrong answers or the performance is not up to the mark, or altogether they do not participate, but gradually they modify their performance on their own through which they cultivate their skill and ability. Mustapha highlights Tatar's view in his study "Why Keep Silent? The Classroom Participation

experiences of non-native-English-speaking students" that active classroom participation can play an important role in the success of education and students' personal development in the future.

Active student participation can be made mandatory by regulating the teaching-learning system by providing equal importance to less motivated or interested learners. Harry G Murray, and Megan Lang in their study "Teaching and Learning in Higher Education" insist that there is a tendency for motivated and brighter learners that they participate more frequently in class, perform better than less motivated or brighter learners (Murray& Lang, 1997, np). It becomes important that they enable every learner of the class to actively participate in discussions and activities. Teacher-learner communication in classroom can be productive when it is a dialogue than monologue to create simulated experience to the learners to improve their psychomotor skills. For instance, now-a-days, group discussion and individual presentation are mandatory to assess the learners' communication skills. While assigning such activities, it becomes essential that it fall under regular assessment pattern. That is a most compelling factor to the learners to enable them participate compulsorily in the activity. Even if the learner is not able to participate during that particular class hour, when it comes under assessment, the learner becomes more conscious to complete his/her turn at least in the subsequent class hour. Usually, when the class strength is around forty, it takes nearly four working hours to make each one participate for at least five minutes/each. In addition to monthly assessment, there will be a summative assessment (end semester) where again the learner is made to actively participate in intellectual/ skill based presentation. They are provided with more number of simulated compulsory contexts through exam for practice and refinement of the skills.

This practice and training is effective with undergraduate learners as they are new to the college level learning and their experience was limited in school curriculum, where they were limited to syllabus-bound learning. They are expected to step ahead into syllabus-free learning and contribute through innovation. The most important hindrance is that they are very much unfocused teenagers during under graduation first year. Most of them are with the mindset that the next three years are meant for enjoyment. It becomes the responsibility of the facilitator to enable the learner to actualize his/ her needs, requirements and future goals including career. Since India is in second position in population, classroom learner strength is in between 40 and 70 learners/ class. When the facilitators propel training based communication skills development class, classroom management is quite challenging. Online *American Psychological Association* defines that "classroom management" is the process by which teachers and schools create and maintain appropriate behaviour of students in classroom settings. The purpose of implementing classroom management strategies is to enhance prosocial behaviour and increase student academic engagement. Effective classroom management principles work across almost all subject areas and grade levels.

It poses challenges not only to the school teachers but also to the college professors of under graduation since the learners are deeply distracted by their teenage fascinations, mass media, computer games and parents who are employed find least time to look after their teenage adolescent boys/girls.

V. CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT FACTORS AND CHALLENGES

A facilitator can never be effectively teaching only with chalk and talk. After continuous research on classroom management, proactive classroom management is preferred over reactive sessions. Therefore, it is mandatory for a constant hunt for innovative teaching methods to accomplish positive response. Teaching has been an important field where young minds are framed so as to meet the future requirements and establish a better space. The early phase is challenging to both the teacher as well as the learner until they settle down with their target and appropriate procedures. The study highlights the main features of enjoyment and empowerment in the learning process of under graduation students. An effective classroom management is expected to take place at three levels. First one is the discipline maintenance in larger classroom that consists of approximately 40 to 70 learners. Second, self-learning is to take place and thirdly apart from improving the literary race, skills cultivation is the dire need of the hour. The highlighted classroom management techniques are supposed to empower the facilitators and the outgoing learners. It is mandatory to provide individual attention to learner participation in classroom. Therefore, their soft skills, hard skills and psychomotor skills are refined and their personality in transformed to be confident and dynamic to a better degree. This guiding and motivating are the two major essential roles of any facilitator in any technologically advanced learning ambience.

In olden days, the knowledge/ skill acquirement and the discipline imposition on students went hand in hand. In the 1700's teachers were given the parental right to act as they would when dealing with discipline problems. Teachers had full responsibility and they can implement corporal punishment to the students under their supervision. Today's classroom and the role of teachers are much more complicated than in the years past. Canter has summed up the challenges faced by teachers in 20th century:

a. Teachers do not receive the respect from parents that they once did.
b. More students come to school with behavioural problems than ever before.
c. Teachers are not sufficiently trained to deal with today's behavioural problems.
d. The myth of the "good" teacher discourages teachers from asking for the assistance they need.
e. Relevant curriculum content is not always enough to motivate students to behave as once thought. (Canter, 1976, p.6)

The scenario has drastically changed because of the over exposure through television, internet and videogames, the major problem which diminish a teacher's real or perceived ability to influence student's behaviour is they are not allowed to even intimidate students in a positive manner.

As a result, now-a- days, the situation is becoming worse that the students are least bothered about respect and discipline. Unfortunately, the parents are not only in a helpless condition but they are unaware of how to show a right way to their adolescent children. This in turn creates tension and pressure to students, parents and facilitators.

Obviously, the teachers are expected to use effective classroom management strategies to develop positive student behaviour. It is an accepted rhetorical statement that a class, which consists of young, unfocused learners of under graduation is challenging even to the most experienced and qualified teacher. When a professor gets into an undergraduate classroom, obviously there are practical inconveniences like the class strength is very large up to 70 members per class, so the classrooms are full. The first challenge that the teacher encounters is the noise caused by murmuring/ talking. The effective classroom management skill requires execution first at the level of learner's behaviour. It is important to take care of the learner's dignity first, as these learners are raw-clay or the reflective-mirrors. When their self-respect gets offended, they either break up or reflect it over the professors. Though the classroom is large with full strength individual attention to an extent that the facilitator is familiar with their name becomes important to make the learner conscious that at any time he/she will be called out perform activity in the class. It is better to state it clearly to the learners the required classroom etiquette and it has to be reiterated now and then, thus behaviour control can take place in due course. Secondly, the discipline implementation is expected to establish an enjoyable learning ambience, which can last for longer duration in learner's mind.

## VI. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The following data is collected from Engineering and Science, and Arts and Science students to document the interesting and effective classes they had during the first two years of study. They have mentioned theories, lived experiences, facts, jokes, group discussion, individual presentation and general knowledge as different factors, which causes interesting and effective learning.

Feedback Factors behind Productive and Interesting Learning	Engineering and Nautical Science Learners	Arts and Science Learners
Theories	9.70%	3.00%
Lived Experiences	25.80%	32.40%
Facts	3.20%	13.50%
Jokes	9.70%	21.60%
Group Discussion	25.80%	13.50%
Individual Presentation	9.70%	2.50%
General Knowledge	16.10%	13.50%

Based on the feedback provided by the learners, the following comparison between the two groups of learners on their priorities and preferences is presented through comparative graph. Series 1 represents the feedback collected from B.E. Engineering and B.Sc. Nautical Science students and Series 2 depicts the data received from BA Arts and B.Sc. Science students:
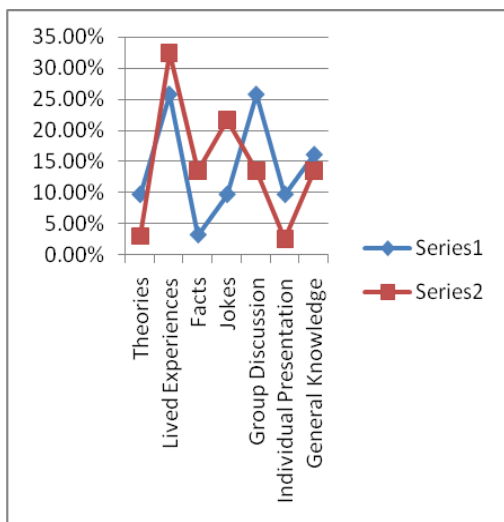
Series 1 Feedback from Bachelor of Engineering & B.Sc. Nautical Science Students
Series 2 Feedback from B.A. Arts & B.Sc. Science Students

Both the groups have not prioritized actual theories of respective subjects represented by the teachers in classroom, since it is there in the prescribed textbooks and Google search whereas lived experiences of the teachers in the form of anecdotes have inspired them and the due credit is nearly 25.8% - 32.4%. It shows the importance of teachers in classroom, in spite of the dominance of internet and computers. Gomathy states in her "Improving the Skills of the Students and Cadets – for Employability – Recent Trends in English Language Teaching" that students of Nautical Science and Marine discipline "gain their knowledge mainly from the books" (Gomathy, 2015, p.98). She recommends that "'technologically updated latest ships, their working mechanisms are to be given as firsthand experience" (Gomathy, 2015, p.98). Further, only teachers can motivate and inspire learners through their own lived experiences. The relevant stories on the lived experiences that are presented during the lectures are really liked by the learners. They not only provide relaxation but they find it as a factor of learning with entertainment. On the other hand, when the learners are given a chance to perform their oral presentation through seminar, storytelling and group discussion sessions, it makes proper vents for their performance, creativity and effort. Similarly, the general knowledge or general awareness information that is shared by the facilitator also motivate the young learners largely.

Arts and Science students prefer facts and jokes than professional degree course learners. Skill based learners of professional degree give due importance to group discussions and individual class room presentations to hone their communication skills and practice in content delivery whereas this quest for skill development seems to be low with the Arts and Science learners. In an English language class as presented by K. Manigandan and N. Santha Kumar in their "Innovation ELT Curriculum and Teaching", the following classroom activities can provide more practice to the learners and they can be encouraged to:
- ✓ express their feelings
- ✓ talk about their self or the people they like or don't like
- ✓ talk about their experiences
- ✓ narrate stories or events
- ✓ read stories or news and discuss about storey or issue

- ✓ read selected passages, and reflect over the language or theme
- ✓ work in collaboration with others
- ✓ actively participate in pair work and group discussions when the students are engaged in these activities, freedom needs to be given to the students
- ✓ to modify the activity
- ✓ to use the required supporting material
- ✓ to use their imagination
- ✓ to come out with their innovative ideas (Manigandan and Santha Kumar, 2017, p.219)

It may be due to lack of sufficient awareness on the importance of skills development that the learners are lagging in actual participation. Sharing facts in classroom also carries less credit since they can venture it by self-learning at under graduation level.

It is observed from the feedback of the learners that in the beginning stage of the college education especially the first year and second year that the learners want to have a detailed summary of the units or concept of a study material and if the facilitator also encourages, they want to go with it. However, at the early stage it is the responsibility of the teachers to familiarize the learners to the actual texts. Rather the learners are to be motivated to find the secondary sources relevant to the primary text, but should not recommend the exclusive dependence on the study material like 'bazaar guides'.

When it comes to an English class, about 0% - 10% of students have completed their higher secondary education through their vernacular (Tamil or any one of the Indian language) medium, for whom the usage of vernacular enhances their understanding and also retains their interest in learning. It requires at least first two years for these learners to get to know or become familiar and be comfortable with the second language English. Liberal use of vernacular also turns out to be a barrier to make the learner familiar with English language. In a way, it is the responsibility of facilitators to motivate the learners to use English both in the spoken and written forms. However, learners' preference varies from 67% and 87% in their likelihood for teaching through English language for arts and science, and Engineering respectively.

At the under graduation level exposing the young learners to focused way of learning or to make them get to know the things and kindle their interest is the main objective of the teachers. They are supposed to sow the seeds of the self-reading and self-learning habit in the minds of the learners. They must be dragged away from rote-learning practices, gradually channelized to read and write on their own after understanding the core concepts of the lesson units, the fact is that according to the feedback nearly 70% of learners prefer self-learning. 62.5% of learners are self-motivated in arts and science domain, but 77.4% of learners are self-driven in technical and professional area.

Though rote learning enables the learner to fetch good marks at higher levels of learning, it handicaps the learner's mind in terms of innovation, creativity and originality. As the existing assessment pattern is also predominantly "through written exam" (Maniganda et al., 2017, p.137), learners consider it as an advantage for not actively participating in classroom activities.

So due importance through mark allocation becomes mandatory to enable the learner participate in activities and gain experience. In order to foster theses skills, self-learning attitude is is to be promoted at the under graduation level itself. Fostering this kind of learner-autonomy is the need of the hour to enhance excellent inventions and discoveries.

VII. CONCLUSION

Overall, in tertiary level of education, skill development has become mandatory in order to enable the learner to be successful in the chosen field. In addition to lecture mode, activities based skill development can make the learner to grow more confident and develop one's own problem solving skills according to the situations. Classroom participation is an effective teaching dynamics to facilitate the learner for self-learning through simulated situations. Classroom management is the sole responsibility of the teacher, and he/ she can make the session lively and interesting by incorporating story-telling method, incorporating relaxation technique like maintaining good sense of humour, sharing one's own valid experiences of learning, group discussions and individual presentation sessions. As a developing country, India aims at improving its literacy rate that stipulates any learner to prioritize rote learning to pass the paper. It is a known fact that Kerala is the only state that has accomplished 100% literacy rate. In order to improvise the current literacy ratio in other states too, Indian government has been consciously taking effort by offering free education until Higher Secondary class in all the government schools and a very nominal fee structure in the government colleges especially for under graduation. Though the increase in literacy rate is gradually being accomplished, the expected proficiency of skills seems to be lacking in most of the learners that leads to unemployment and unemployability. Required skills are to be cultivated to the students by a number of different activities for which proactive class room management becomes the need of the hour. In under graduation level, the learner should be exposed to actual learning by undergoing the experience of learning through different activities like presentation and group discussion, which can strengthen their interpersonal communication skills, subject knowledge and professional skill. The realization based on this study can enable the facilitators to plan and execute different activities based teaching to assure effective and productive learning ambience to the learners.

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AUTHORS PROFILE

Dr. M. Subha has completed her PhD in Indian Writing in English from the University of Madras in 2018. She has been serving as Assistant Professor in the **Department of English**, Academy of Maritime Education and Training, **AMET Deemed to be University**, Chennai – 603112, Tamil Nadu, India, since October 2018. She was lecturer in English at **SASTRA Deemed to be University,** Thanjavur, TN, India, from 2004 to 2007. She has published a number of research articles in both online, indexed, refereed journals and books. She is an active, lifetime member in Athens Institute for Education and Research (Atiner), Athens, Greece. www.atiner.gr. Her area of research interest includes Contemporary Indian Writing in English, Global Anglophone Literature and English Language Teaching.

Dr. D. Nagarani has completed her PhD in English from the University of Madras in 2017. She has been serving as Assistant Professor in the **Department of English**, Anna Adarsh College for Women, Anna Nagar, Chennai – 600040. Her area of research interest includes European Modernism, Russian Literature. Currently she is teaching Postcolonial Literature and World Literature in Translation.